

Acts 19

Part 1

Speaker	Michael Vogelsang
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[00:00:00] Acts 19, from verse 1.

And it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, unto what then were ye baptized? And they said unto John's baptism.

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them. They spake with tongues and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve. And he went into the synagogue and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things [00:01:01] concerning the kingdom of God.

But when thy verse were hardened and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one tyrannous.

And this continued by the space of two years, so that all they which dwelled in Asia heard the word of the Lord, of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

And God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul. So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, we adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. And there were seven sons of one Sciphi, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?

[00:02:02] And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them and overcame them and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks, also dwelling at Ephesus.

And fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came and confessed and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men. And they counted the price of them and found it

50,000 pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. And then we turn to the epistle of the Ephesians for a moment, chapter one, verse one.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God to the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace be to you and peace from God our father [00:03:01] and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. That we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace.

Beloved brethren, I have the exercise on my heart in these three occasions that we, Lord willing, will be having together to visit with you the brothers and sisters at Ephesus as they are described to us in the scripture. So that we might learn something from this assembly [00:04:04] of this group of saints and their development as it is shown to us in the scripture. At the beginning we have this hymn chosen where it says, all that strong in faith abiding be made to their savior clean. Not with him our hearts dividing, all of him content to leave.

And we will find out I think that this exactly was the main problem in this meeting in Ephesus.

We're going to see this later. But today, we're going to see this in the scripture. We're going to see this later. But today, I hope to show first of all, a little bit about the beginning of the local assembly in Ephesus as it is described in the book of Acts. And later, a bit about the subjects Paul could write to them about in the epistle to the Ephesians, which is as you know, one of the most precious truths [00:05:01] that are revealed in the New Testament. He could write it to this group of saints, this assembly in Ephesus.

But first of all, we might dwell a bit about how this local assembly was formed, built there in Ephesus.

I'm not going to go through all the verses in detail.

But I would like to touch on a few features, which I think are always to be found when a local assembly comes into existence.

I'm not speaking about the beginning of the assembly, which we find in the second of Acts when the Holy Ghost came down, but about the matter that a local assembly is formed.

When I think about my country and you about yours, you might perhaps say what is said, feeling in our hearts, this is nothing for us because we are living in times where meetings close and where no meetings are formed and built.

But let me just say three things about this.

[00:06:04] First of all, this is, of course, not quite true. Even today, and even in our countries, the Lord is working and we find perhaps only single incidents, but we find that new meetings are formed at

some places.

Secondly, when we see it global, we find there are countries like India, like Romania, where the spread of meetings is surprisingly, they are growing fast.

And thirdly, and that is the matter for us, perhaps we are attending a meeting that exists for a number of times, a number of years, and we may ask ourselves, are the features still there, which were there when this meeting at Ephesus was formed?

And seven points I would like to mention. First of all, it says in the beginning of this chapter in the first verse, and it came to pass that Paul came to Ephesus.

That's the first point. [00:07:02] The Lord Jesus had a servant, Paul, the apostle, and he sent him to Ephesus.

That's the way how God works. God could, of course, work without using any man, and he does so from time to time, converting somebody without the use of any human instrument. But this is not the normal way God acts in our time. We find in the scriptures that it says that faith comes out of preaching. The normal way is that God uses a servant, sends him to someplace to preach the gospel there. And so this first thing was there. Paul came to Ephesus.

So today even the Lord put it on the heart of the servants to go to particular places to preach the gospel there, and or perhaps he knows of believers there, and he goes to them to tell them about the truth. So the first thing is that God uses his human instruments, his servants, to go to particular places to preach the word. [00:08:01] That's the first step when a local assembly should come into being, that there is somebody who preaches the gospel, or in our days, where there are a lot of believers who are scattered in all kinds of Christian denominations, and perhaps there are those where a desire for the truth is felt, and they get into contact with some servant, and he goes there to speak to the believers to tell them about the truth. And that's the next point. He came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples. There were disciples there at this place. And this is, in our country especially, different perhaps from the mission field, when you go somewhere, you will find believers there. Certain disciples were there.

And so Paul could speak to them and could expound the truth to them. Certain disciples were there. So generally speaking, we want to take all these features typically, generally speaking, [00:09:01] if an assembly should be formed, it's not only necessary that there is a servant or more than one gifted to speak the word, but there must be disciples. And what are disciples?

Perhaps Paul himself is a good example. When he speaks in this 22nd chapter of Acts, he speaks about his conversion.

And when doing so, he mentions a few features which are characteristic of every true disciple of the Lord Jesus.

The first point mentioned, chapter 22, verse seven, and I fell unto the ground.

The first thing is that somebody has seen himself in the light of the word of God and falls to the ground before the Lord Jesus as a repentant sinner.

Coming to him and Paul was shone, there's light shone round about him. If you compare Acts chapter nine and the two chapters where he tells this conversion, you will find that the light gets always brighter. And in the last, it is brighter than the sun. [00:10:01] And so here is somebody who fell to the ground before the Lord. The second is that this chapter, the only one, mentions the two questions that Paul asked when he was in the presence of the Lord. The first one, chapter eight, who art thou, Lord?

And first question, we realize that he acknowledges the Lord Jesus as Lord. He says, who art thou, Lord? He's not speaking about Savior, which is always right. He's not speaking about Jesus or Jesus Christ. He says, Lord. Acknowledging the Lord Jesus as Lord and Savior. So he says, who art thou?

And then the Lord Jesus answered him, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecute. Even here at this very early beginning, Paul got an idea what assembly tooth is.

The idea that the Lord Jesus and his body on earth, the head and the body, are united. Because he was, of course, persecuting the saints. But the Lord says, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecute. [00:11:01] And the second question, verse 10, he says, what shall I do, Lord?

The next characteristic of a disciple is that he is obedient and that he asks the Lord what he wants him to do. What shall I do, Lord? And this question, I'm sure, was the question which Paul, in all his life, continued to ask.

In every incident, he asked the Lord, what shall I do, Lord? And so we find this wonderful incident in the book of Acts that the Lord could guide in him through the places where he wanted him. That is a disciple.

Two disciples who asked, what shall I do, Lord? And only when we start asking this question, the Lord could guide us and bring us to an understanding what the assembly is in his eyes. A lot of people, only today in our Christian countries, they are sufficient to say, to speak about Jesus and to say some things about him as the joy of their life [00:12:03] or whatever it is, that they are not asking really, what shall I do, Lord?

When we ask this question, we will get an answer to this question. And we had it in the Bible reading today. This answer might be perplexing for us, first of all, but he can guide us on when we really have this desire in our heart to do what the Lord tells us to do. Who art thou, Lord? What shall I do, Lord? And then we find there's a consequence in verse 15, for thou shalt be his witness unto all men.

Then the disciple is a witness to the Lord after he has found him, grown he is a witness unto all men.

So Paul, when he came to this country, to this city of Ephesus, he found certain disciples there. Well, we find, I'm not going to touch on these details now, but of course, these disciples were in a particular situation in the book of Acts because they only knew the baptism of John. They didn't know that the Holy Ghost had come. And so there was a special situation. [00:13:03] They had to be baptized by Paul on the Lord Jesus' name. And he put his hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost. This was a particular special situation for these, which is not the normal situation nowadays when the full gospel is preached and the person is sealed with the Holy Ghost.

But the next thing we find, the third feature in this, is that Paul went into the synagogue and spoke to

them, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. He was speaking to them about the kingdom of God. Disciples are living in the kingdom of God. And he was persuading them about these things, telling them about the truth, ministering to the saints. That's so important a matter if an assembly should be founded that they are taught in the truth of the scriptures. Very often we find that saints are satisfied with being a kind of mission club.

[00:14:01] They want to preach the gospel, which is right and good, but they never find time to sit at the feet of Lord Jesus and to be taught in the scriptures the truth concerning the kingdom of God, to learn more about the truth, more about the things of God. But Paul, who was one of the greatest evangelists of all time, he had the desire in his heart to teach them into the truth of God. He was so successful that, we find it later, he could teach this saint in Ephesus some of the highest truths we find in the New Testament in this epistle he is writing to them. And it all started with the fact that he was teaching them concerning the kingdom of God. The teaching of the saints is always two sides. There is one side, which was the particular and special task of Paul, the truth of the assembly, which was not revealed in the Old Testament. And even the other apostles had not this particular revelation about the Lord Jesus and his assembly, [00:15:02] but he also spoke about the kingdom of God, about these different features. We might see something more tomorrow, Lord willing. But there's also the personal side. Every disciple is living in the kingdom of God and has a personal relationship with his Lord and Savior and has to grow in this. But then, shortly afterwards, it happens in this city of Ephesus, Paul was speaking up to this moment in the synagogue, that there were those that were hardened, they believed not, and they started to speak evil about this group of Christians.

And then we read that Paul separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of Mount Terence.

We find that the time has come that Paul separated these disciples from the mass of the Jewish people surrounding to form this new local assembly there in Terence.

And typically speaking, this is still today [00:16:01] the place of those who want to be true to the word of God, to separate together to the name of the Lord Jesus in separation from everything that is not in accordance to his word. He separated the disciples to this particular place. Perhaps if I find this verse, I must try to look at it.

And when Paul got saved in Acts chapter nine, there was this man, Ananias, whom God sent, whom the Lord sent to Paul.

And he, I may start reading verse 13, Acts nine, verse 13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem.

And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, go thy way, for he's a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name [00:17:01] before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. And I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And not exactly the one I was looking for, but in some other scripture, the Lord says that he was sending Paul to the people and nations out of which he had taken him.

So we see these two sides.

On the one hand, this place of separation, the believer is taken out of the world. He's not part of this world, but nevertheless, he is sent into the world as a testimony.

And the Lord Jesus himself says in his prayer in John 17, they are not from the world as I am not from the world. And on the other hand, as he was sent into the world, they were sent into the world. So these two things have to be in a godly harmony.

Sometimes people say, well, if you take this [00:18:02] separated place, you are useless in this world, you will not be a testimony, but it's just the opposite. As long as we are in association with all kinds of things in this world, we cannot be a real testimony to the Lord, a real witness against these things. But only those who take this separated place as disciples of the Lord Jesus, they are the ones whom he sends into the world as his witnesses.

And so this believer, see in Ephesus, they take this place. And then we find in verse 10, the fifth feature, so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Again, the word of the Lord Jesus, that's what preached in this company of believers. It was preached in a way that everybody could hear it in this company.

They were a separated company, but that does not mean that nobody knew anything about them. The word of the Lord Jesus, that was what everybody there in Asia heard. And it is, I might just mention it in passing, [00:19:04] coming to the end of the development. Here we find all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus. And at the end of his life, Paul said all in Asia had left him. This was the end of this development, which here so wonderfully began, that everybody in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus. And when, in his last letter, Paul writes to his young fellow worker, Timothy, who also accompanied him in a lot of work he did at Ephesus. He writes to him concerning the last stage, preach the word, that's it, the word of the Lord Jesus. Not some entertainment or some kind of things to arouse the interest of people, as we might think it, simply preaching the word of the Lord Jesus. That's what they did at the beginning. And that's what Paul tells Timothy at the end of his ministry. And this is still the same till the end of time, to preach the word. And that was what happened. The word of the Lord Jesus was preached. [00:20:01] And so everybody in Asia could hear.

How wonderful it is when we take the word of God and preach the word of the Lord Jesus. It's sad to say that very often we find, at least in my country, this is, you very often find it in Christian circles that they take one verse of the Bible out of context at the beginning of their sermon, and then they speak about anything they would like to speak about, but not the word of the Lord. Really taking the word, expounding it to the hearers, and showing them the word of the Lord Jesus.

And the sixth feature is in verse 11, and God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul. Well, of course, at this time we are talking about here, this was a particular time of the beginning. God had spoken about this, that he was going to do these things. I just quote from the Gospel of Mark, in Mark 16.

Mark 16, we read in the very last word about the disciples.

[00:21:04] And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following.

This was one of the things that happened here. And perhaps we could as well quote Hebrews chapter two, where we find a similar thing, Hebrews two. Hebrews chapter two, verse four. God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will. This was what happened at this particular time, at the beginning of

the Christian testimony. And as we know from other scriptures, this ceased to do, it even ceased during the time of the apostles. If you study the book of Acts to the end, we find fewer and fewer mentioning of miracles and things like that. And in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul speaks about these things, [00:22:05] 12, 13, about tongues and these things that they were going to cease during this dispensation.

But I would like to take this verse typically. Couldn't we say that the history of every local assembly, we could write in God wrote special miracles? Miracles, not in a way we have them here as great supernatural things. But if we consider, I don't know how long this local assembly in Gullah Shields exists now. I heard that Duke Kenzie is over 100 years on other assemblies.

Obviously there will be 10 years, 20 years, 30 years of existence. I must, don't we have to say this is a miracle? That this company is still there?

That besides and contrary to all our weakness and failure, still there is the company gathering to the Lord's name. Must we not say God wrote miracles? And if we think about ourselves gathering together, young children being brought up in the meetings, [00:23:03] I'm getting saved. Must we not say this is a miracle? That God, every conversion still is a miracle. But God has wrought in the midst of his sins. Perhaps others are coming from outside, they get saved when the gospel is preached and find their place amidst the sins. God is still, has still wrought a miracle.

Or perhaps when we find that he has shown his care and about the servants in their ministry, they were not harmed, even the attack of Satan is there, but they still stand for the truth amid all the attacks God has wrought in the world.

So we still must say that every local assembly is a testimony to the miracles that God still is working amidst his people.

And the seventh feature is then in verse 17, where we read, and fear fell on them all.

[00:24:02] And fear fell on them all. There was godly fear among this company of believers. Godly fear.

And this godly fear had a double result in their lives.

The first thing was, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. When there is really a godly fear in a company of believers, the name of the Lord Jesus will be magnified.

That is the normal result of this. It could not be otherwise than when there is godly fear that we look at this person, the Lord Jesus whom the Father has honored and we will honor him ourselves. The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, one thing. The second thing was that there was a separation from everything that was not in accordance with this name. They magnify.

We couldn't magnify the name of the Lord Jesus on the one hand and go on in all kinds of association and things which couldn't stand the eye of the Lord Jesus [00:25:01] and couldn't find his value, that he says, this is right in my eyes. We find that there in this particular city of Ephesus, there were a number of believers among them who up to this point had been still in association with some occult things they had done before their conversion. Now they were converted, but they still had these things on their bookshelves and in their homes. And now when the Lord's fear was there and

when the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, they realized that these things could no longer be there. And then they brought these books together and burned them before all men.

Counted the price, it was found, 50,000 pieces of silver. They saw these things, we have to get rid of these things. And this is always what we find, really. When we have this godly fear and when the Lord Jesus is magnified in our hearts, [00:26:01] then we will perhaps go through our homes, our bookshelves or whatever it is, and perhaps we find there are things we should get rid of. And they did it.

They burned them before all. Of course, we didn't have to do it like them. We didn't have to gather somewhere in the marketplace to make a great fire or something, but the Lord can show every one of us what it is, which he didn't want us to have in our lives. Well, I know about a brother who told me once, a young brother, a good friend of mine, he told me once that he acted like this. Literally, he found some things in his bookshelf which shouldn't be there and he made a fire and burned them so he could never be tempted to go back to this again.

And we find then these entries out of it. So in verse 20, so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. So there was spiritual growth. As long as we have associations with things that hinder us really growing in the Lord, [00:27:04] there will be no spiritual growth. But when we do away with these things, spiritual growth might come to us.

This could happen quite quickly. We talked about it in the Bible reading today about this thief at the cross. It is amazing how his spiritual growth happened more or less in a second. He was unconverted.

Then he saw the Lord Jesus and he got converted. And what he knew about the Lord Jesus was tremendous for this time he had to think about these things. But perhaps there are things in my life or in yours that hinder our growth. But here we find this local assembly in Ephesus and the word of God grew mightily in them.

And therefore, because of this wonderful condition, said to say, we will find that this did not prevail over all the years. But here at the beginning, it was so wonderful what God could work among them that Paul could write to them this wonderful epistle. [00:28:01] We read a few verses from the beginning in this Ephesian epistle. The epistle to the Ephesians is, as most epistles of Paul, clearly divided into two parts.

The first three chapters show us the doctrine on the second three chapters show us the practice, the practical work. Joshua, to Joshua it was said, when the people of Israel would depart from the way of God, they would hear a voice behind them that was saying, this is the way, walk ye therein.

And I often thought that this verse could be a headline for the epistles of Paul.

This is the way, that's what he normally in the first chapters teaches, the doctrine, this is the way.

And in the second half of his epistles, he says, walk ye therein.

[00:29:01] How come the practical applications of what he's brought before them before.

And so in his first three chapters, we have the doctrine of this epistle. Chapter one, we find God's purpose in Christ. And in the second chapter, we find God's work in carrying out this purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in chapter three, God's way in making this purpose known to us as believers.

And so we find in this first chapter, the purpose of God, which is in all the epistle, the purpose of God in Christ is revealed in such a wonderful way as in this psalm. And of course, we have no time to deal with this whole epistle, it would take us some weeks to do so.

And we just touch upon a few precious points in the beginning. Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, he begins by the will of God. There was no man, when he speaks about the purpose of God, he stresses the fact that when he was an apostle, [00:30:02] he was so by the will of God, because God had chosen him as the instrument to reveal this wonderful purpose to his beloved saints.

And so he writes to the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

The saints that were in Ephesus, this local assembly that was formed in Acts 19 and had been proven as faithful the time they had gone on now to them he writes, and he wishes them as he so often does in his epistles, grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace.

This grace that we all need on our way till the end and the inner peace that everybody needs.

And he wishes them that they should have this peace of soul while walking here, the peace that our Lord Jesus ever enjoyed when he was down on earth, the peace he had in his soul and heart in communion with the Father. [00:31:02] He wishes this to these saints. And then he says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

In this verse, we find first of all, the source of all our blessings. The source of all our blessings is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All this finds its origin, its source, in the Lord Jesus, in God, our Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody of us could have ever thought about such a thing. If we could have thought of anything at all, we might have thought perhaps we could get a little place in heaven, so to say, just to be saved and get a little place. Oh, the prodigal wanted to say, he didn't say so. Make me one of thy higher servants.

These are the things which are in our heart, perhaps, but here we find that God had in his heart, he is the source of all our blessing. And then he speaks in the second half of this verse [00:32:02] about the character of these blessings. He first says he's blessed us with all blessings.

All, there's nothing left then.

There's not one blessing which we don't have. All blessings are in the heart of God towards us, and he has fulfilled them in the person of his beloved Son, Christ. All blessings, and they are called spiritual blessings, spiritual blessings, not earthly blessings. Israel, they had earthly blessings down

here, and they were always connected with, if you do this, then this will happen. And if Israel was ill, then because they didn't obey the word of God. If they were not rich but poor, because they didn't obey the word of God. They had these blessings, these earthly blessings, and we don't have this, not at all, today.

And we must be quite clear about this, that we as Christians have no earthly blessings. [00:33:01] First of all, there's a great danger, some, well, evangelists or whatever we might call them, in America, they preach this kind of gospel that wealth and health is something which shows you that God has blessed you specially. But this is definitely not the teaching of Scripture. Then Paul would have been the poorest man on earth. He had no wealth, and even his health was not as some might have considered it.

But he was one of the most blessed persons on earth. And even in this chapter later on, in this epistle later on, when he speaks about, for example, in chapter six about the children, he says, children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise.

He only says here, this commandment in the Old Testament was a commandment, the first commandment with a promise. [00:34:01] That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long enough. He does not want to say this promise is, even now, the promise of the believer, because that would mean, or say it another way around, how many godly persons who have honored their parents died very early. We are living in different times. In Israel, it was exactly this, that God had made this commandment with a promise.

They obeyed, they should live long on earth, but this is not a blessing. Of course, he wants to say, if you obey your parents, you do something which the Lord will bless, but the blessing is different. It doesn't mean that he's not blessing, but it's a different blessing. It's a spiritual blessing he gives us, and not an earthly one.

Of course, we know in how many ways the Lord has, even in this practical earthly things, has given us and shown us his goodness and kindness, but it's different from speaking about our blessings. The blessings of the Christian are spiritual blessings, [00:35:02] and they are in heavenly places. Israel was earthly and material. Our blessings are spiritual and heavenly, heavenly places in Christ.

Everything we have, we have in Christ. It was mentioned at the prayer at the beginning that the word of the Lord Jesus is the basis for everything, for every blessing we have, and so it really is. All our spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Well, perhaps you might think this a bit complicated.

When I was young, I couldn't really, I have to say I didn't really know what all these spiritual blessings in heavenly places really is, but this is what the apostle is just going on to say, showing us some of these wonderful spiritual blessings.

First of all, in the next verse, according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. Here we find that we find the beginning of this blessing, [00:36:06] before the foundation of the world.

It's not said of Israel, anything concerning his earthly people was at its origin before the foundation of the world, but it started from the foundation of the world.

But before the foundation of the world, there was nothing created. No world was created.

In God's heart was this purpose, that there were those he has chosen in him before the foundation of the world. It's of course a bit difficult subject again.

Sometimes you find people who say, well, if I'm not chosen before the foundation of the world, I can't, I'm not responsible whether I get saved or not. It's solely God's matter if he chose me or not. I don't know if he's chosen me.

Well, Paul writes to the Thessalonians, [00:37:04] interesting sentence.

He writes to the Thessalonians in the beginning of his epistle, verse four, 1 Thessalonians 1, verse four, knowing brethren beloved your election of God.

How does he know that? Did he take a look into God's book of counsels or how did he know that the Thessalonians were elected of God? Well, because they were saved, because they were chosen. So one thing is, I use this picture which has often been used. I learned it from all the brothers and I think it gives a good illustration of how we have to approach this subject if somebody is unsaved, an unbeliever, then he comes to this great door and above this door you find repent and confess your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus. When he watches through this door, he sees a house brightly lit and great festival [00:38:02] and he would like to be there and he reads this sentence, repent and confess your sins.

And then when he enters through the door, he looks back, he sees on the other side of the door written chosen before the foundation of the world.

There's nothing God is talking about to unbelievers about this subject. It's a family affair so to say for those who have accepted the Lord Jesus. For the unbeliever, God has only to say one thing, repent and confess your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus. Nothing else is said to the unbeliever. And the second thing I would like to mention in connection with this sovereign choice of God, as far as I know, it doesn't say in scripture that he chose some to be saved.

Because there were saved before the Christian dispensation and there will be saved ones after the Christian dispensation but before the foundation of the world, God chose some to have these special blessings [00:39:03] in heavenly places, to have this place in the Father's house. The Lord Jesus says in John 14, in my Father's house are many mansions.

He does not say I'm going to, there are many mansions. And as one brother once said, one answer to the question why does God send the Lord Jesus, why does he want to save us is simply because there were these many mansions and he wanted to fill them with men. And so before the foundation, he has chosen those who belong to the Christian dispensation to the church of God to have this particular special place in the heavenly places with all the spiritual blessings. So we find here that it is said chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. We couldn't really understand this. We often sing about it in our hymns or uttered in prayer on the Lord's day morning that we couldn't really understand why he was even thinking of us before the foundation of the world. [00:40:02] There was

nothing in us which might have been attractive to him.

But he, in his sovereign choice, he's chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. And then we find the great end that God had in view in verse four, second half, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. We should be before him, holy and without blame in love.

We have here really three features which characterizes the Lord Jesus, holy, without blame and love.

And they should characterize us before him.

So we are accepted in the beloved as it says, or we are so to say similar to him having the same characteristics as the Lord Jesus. That was the anterior in view that we should be before him. He was headed as his own pleasure to have those before him as holy, without blame and in love. [00:41:03] And then he says in verse five, having predestinated us into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. Predestination, which is the next, another of these heavenly blessings mentioned here. Predestination, this always has to do with a particular blessing.

Chosen before the foundation of the world, that is the general term so to say, but he has predestinated us into the position of sonship. As the adoption of children, it should really be sonship. So as sons of God.

This is a special blessing that's always connected with predestination that we are predestinated to this particular position as sons.

We are children of God, it's one thing. We are also sons.

The position of a son speaks more of the mature [00:42:05] understanding and relationship with the father. When, for example, to use a picture as a visitor coming by train, I wouldn't say I'm sending my children to fetch him, but I could send my son to fetch the visitor.

He speaks of a mature understanding and relationship with the father and his blessings. We are not only children of God, that is a position we all share, but we are also predestinated as sons.

By Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. We find that chosen by the foundation before the foundation of the world, that was the sovereign choice of grace. But here in verse five, we have the good pleasure of his will. If we answer the question, why did God predestinate us into this position of sonship?

[00:43:01] Into this position of sonship, the simple answer is because he wanted to. It was the good pleasure of his will. Everything finds its origin in God in these verses.

So we are sons in this wonderful position by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. The Lord Jesus, after his resurrection, when he speaks to Mary Magdala, he says to her, go to my brethren. This is something which he hadn't said before, but only after his resurrection.

Uses the term once, but in a different sense, when he says, those sitting around me, these are my

brothers and sisters and mother and so on. But in the sense he was talking about it after his resurrection only, he says, go to my brethren and tell to them that I am going to ascend to my father and your father, to my God and your God. [00:44:01] He brings us into the same position as he himself is with his God and father. He's mentioned here the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we know that Paul in this epistle especially has two prayers addressed to the God and to the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it's also good for us to remember that in all things, the Lord Jesus has the preeminent place. He says, I'm going to ascend to my father and your father.

It doesn't say our father, my God and your God. Even if we are in the same relationship and nearness to God, he has this place of preeminence in all things, even in this relationship in which we are brought according to the good pleasure of his will. So I really think this is something to meditate upon when we are occupied with these things and ask the question, why all this? Because he wanted to do so. It was really God's good pleasure of his will. And then he says, to the praise of the glory of his grace, [00:45:04] wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved. Another of the spiritual blessings, we are made accepted in the beloved.

Acceptable before God, not because of anything we have done, but because accepted in the beloved.

Paul says in the epistle to the Philippians that he had a lot of things.

Philippians 2, he speaks about a lot of things. No, it's chapter three. A lot of things he could mention, humanly speaking, as something which he had on his account of positive things. He speaks about what happened to him, what was his position, because he was a Jew, and about all the things he had gained through his effort in the Jewish things.

But then he says, no, that's not what I want to have.

[00:46:02] And he speaks about it. Perhaps I'm going to find this verse. In chapter three, well, perhaps, read from where he speaks about the justification.

Ah, yes, in verse nine.

Philippians 3, verse nine. Be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

So he was accepted in the beloved, standing before God in the righteousness of faith. Nothing of his own that he could mention. It was all loss and no gain for him.

And so we find accepted in the beloved, [00:47:01] in whom we have redemption through his blood. Another of these spiritual blessings is mentioned, redemption through his blood, redeemed.

So to say, bought with a price out of the slave market to set free, bought out of this place through a price that was paid for us. Paul says in another verse, you are not your own. You are bought by a price.

And so this is what redemption speaks about. And another thing he mentioned, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

Forgiveness of sins, another of these points. When we really understand what forgiveness is, in three hours of darkness, we see the judgment of God about sins.

And if we meditate on this a bit, we might understand what sin is in the eyes of God. And then we will understand what forgiveness of sins means. Forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. It is wonderful to compare, and I'm closing with that, [00:48:04] compare these two expressions.

In verse six, the glory of his grace. And in verse seven, the riches of his grace. The riches of his grace is that what meets our need as sinners. And the glory of his grace is what comes out of the good pleasure of his will. We could find this, could take this picture of the prodigal son.

When he came back, the riches of the grace of the father were that he said, well, let's clothe him with a new garment and put shoes on his foot.

But in the glory of his grace, he says, come into the house and sit at my table.

My son is back, and he gives him this place of sonship again. This is the riches, the glory of his grace. To his own glory, because it was a good pleasure of his will. Forgiveness of sins and redemption is the riches of his grace.

[00:49:02] But in the glory of his grace, he did much more than that, putting us into this position of sons and blessing us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

What a wonderful truth.

Could the apostle lay out before the believers at Ephesus, because they were in the spiritual condition to understand these things.

We will see that they did not prevail in this. But the question for us is, are we in such a position to really value what God is going to say us in this wonderful epistle?

All the epistles Paul writes, they are exactly in accordance with the condition in which the different local assemblies were. And Ephesus was at such a wonderful condition that he could unfold to them this blessed truth. And may the Lord give to me, unto you, unto each of us, that we are really in a condition that he could unfold to us the purpose in his heart, [00:50:04] and that we might get the gain of these epistles. It is really worthwhile studying in some quiet time this epistle in detail. There are so many spiritual blessings mentioned in it. And it is a sign of our spiritual condition when we are really occupied with these things and enjoy them in the Lord Jesus. This position in which we are brought and all the blessings he has given us. May the Lord bless his word to us.